

GB Meter Franking

Part 3—The First Three Years

Jack Peach's history of meter franking continues—Pitney Bowes takes off, closely followed by Universal Postal Frankers, UPF exhibit at Wembley and in 1925 the first Neopost machine is approved

Pitney Bowes takes off

The last article (*GSM*, June 2001) brought our story to July/August 1922, when the Universal Stamping Machine Co was licensed to supply Pitney Bowes Model A meter franking machines for use in UK.

The London subsidiary, Postage Meters and Machines Company, was naturally the first commercial user with License A1, the prefix 'A' was included to denote Model A. Early 'Sample' dies included this prefix and were used for several years for demonstration purposes (*Fig 26*). However, as was noted in the last article, the letter 'A' was omitted from the first commercial frank dies and from the illustration accompanying the notice to postmasters in the Post Office Circular dated 23 August 1922 (*Fig 27*, Courtesy Heritage Collections of the Post Office). Following that of the manufacturer, the next four licenses were granted to:

A2 Prudential Assurance Co Ltd (½d. and 1½d. meters).

A3 J Barker & Co Ltd (½d. and 1½d. meters).

A4 Derry & Toms (½d., 1d. and 1½d. meters).

A5 J Lee Ltd (½d. and 1½d. meters).

One stipulation of the Post Office in granting licenses was that 'the name and address of the renter must be printed on the top left hand corner of all envelopes or wrappers or labels stamped by the machine'. J Lee Ltd happened to be bookmakers and to advertise their name conflicted with gaming laws. It was therefore agreed that only the initials J L should appear (*Fig 28*). The ink colour for the franks was a standardised bright red, in keeping with the UPU regulations. It is interesting to note that after a few years, either by design or error, Machine No 2, used by the Prudential, adopted a distinctive magenta ink.

As business grew, the Postage Meters & Machines Co opened a Birmingham office using machine No 29 (*Fig 29*). Note the London address has been overprinted.

Although the Model A machine was fast in operation, some large companies found it necessary to have another at the same address. These each had the same serial number but the second used a prefix A (this time not related to the model). *Fig 30* shows the mark made by the second machine at Great Western Railway.

As with adhesive stamps, the Post Office was required to send copies of the marks to other members of the UPU. This involved the Universal Stamping Machine Co in supplying 413 copies of each value printed on separate pieces of card!

UPF not far behind

The six months, May to September 1922, was a very active period. In the last article the formation of the company, Universal

Postal Frankers, was mentioned, with Edward Kinnard as Managing Director.

Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company was represented on the Board and their subsidiary Sterling Telephone & Electric Co Ltd provided the manufacturing capacity to produce the modified Moss machine or 'New Zealand Machine' as it came to be called. Kinnard's own small company, Pedersen's Gauges, undertook the development.

Various reports and letters from this period show that the Post Office was faced by a bit of a dilemma. Politically they had to do what they could to foster British industry, but the meter machine which had been tried and tested and which met their technical requirements was made in the USA. Only one British machine was in the field. The Post Office could not be seen to arrange a monopoly. In granting a licence to the American Universal Stamping Machine Co, it was made clear that 'while the Postmaster General would not object to the importation of machines made in America in the first instance, he would expect that machines to be used under his licence would be manufactured in this country within a reasonable period'.

Mr Kinnard was well aware of these Post Office views and on 20 June 1922 (four months before his machine was ready for use) wrote a very interesting letter to Sir Evelyn Murray, Secretary to the General Post Office. It would seem that there had been 'several lengthy conferences' between

Fig 26 Sample die including the letter 'A' to denote a Model A machine

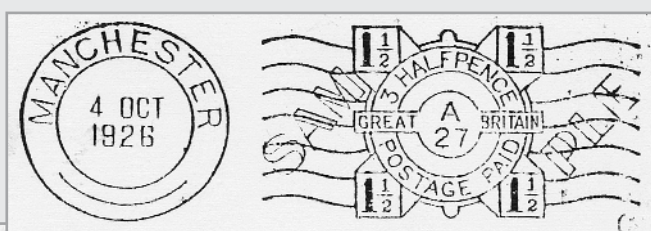


Fig 28 Frank used by bookmakers J Lee Ltd

J. L. 40-41 Conduit St. W. 1.

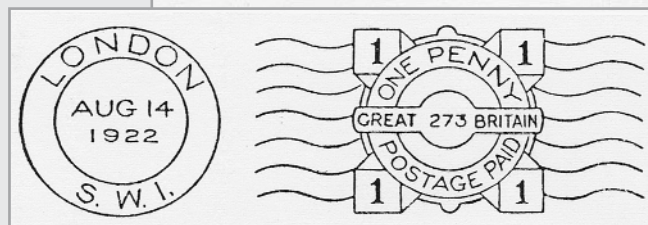
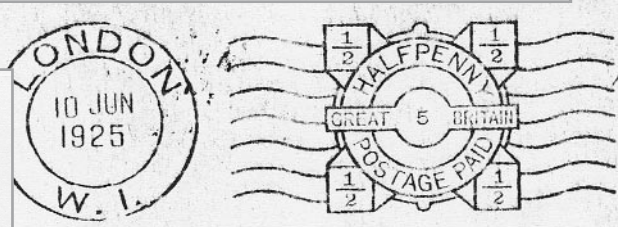


Fig 27 Commercial franks omitted the letter 'A'



POSTAGE METERS & MACHINES CO.,
IMPERIAL BUILDINGS,
56 KINGSWAY, W.C.2.
VICTORIA BUILDINGS,
5A, TEMPLE ROW, BIRMINGHAM.

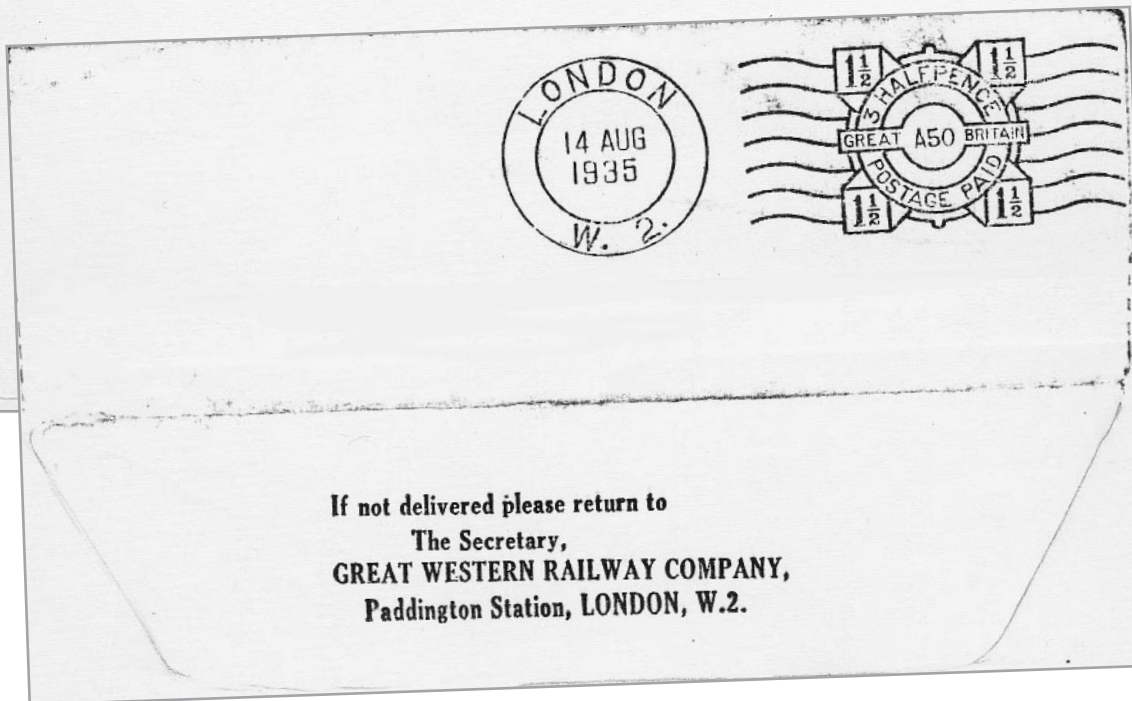


Fig 29 Cover from the Birmingham office of the Postage Meters & Machines Co

Fig 30 Frank from the second machine of the Great Western Railway. This had the same serial number as the first machine prefixed by the letter 'A'

himself and Mr Wheeler of Pitney Bowes regarding Universal Postal Frankers (UPF) making both the American meter franking machines and the Universal stamp cancelling machines, then also being used by the Post Office.

Although at that stage the tentative proposal was not acceptable to his directors, he sought an assurance from the Post Office that they would agree and would 'discourage the investment of further Capital by other firms ...' In the event, the status quo was maintained for the time being. Mr Kinnard also mentioned in the letter that they were fitting their 'Automatic Detachable Meter' to an International Cancelling Machine (The American company, International Postal Supply Company, was in direct competition with the Universal Stamping Machine Company

and manufactured the Hey Dolphin stamp cancelling machines, also used in UK since 1914). He also stated that UPF were proceeding with the design and construction of a medium-speed, electrically-driven device, which they hoped to submit shortly.

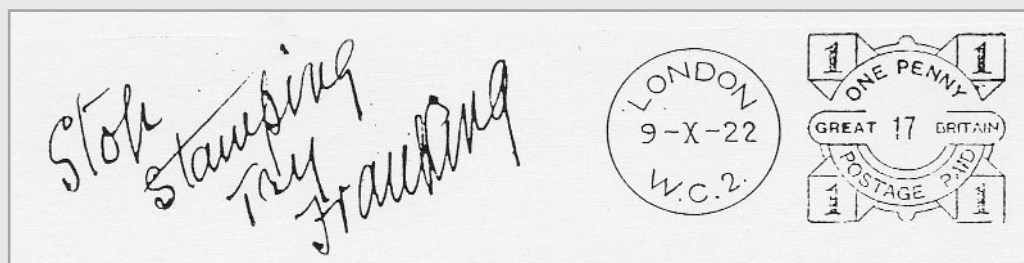
Although the first commercial use of the UPF machine No 1 was 18 October 1920 (Fig 25 in the last article), Mr Kinnard was already thinking of slogans on 9 October. He knew that the Pitney Bowes Model A machine, as then designed, would not accommodate a slogan around the die hub as well as the town mark and frank. Fig 31 (Courtesy Heritage Collections of the Post Office) shows a slogan design hand-drawn by Mr Kinnard to demonstrate the use. The town mark is also hand-drawn but the frank had been printed by the franking machine. The reason for the number 17 is

not known. The first machine to be used commercially was No 1 but other specimens of frank No 17 are in the Post Office collection. An engraved die of the slogan was made for use in a machine and was so used commercially on machine No 1, London WC2, in December 1922. An example is shown in Fig 32 (Courtesy Dr R McInroy). The mark was printed in three operations; frank, slogan and wavy lines, with the town mark in a space within the wavy lines. The size was 25x25mm—as for the first commercially used franks.

Discovery

Now comes the interesting bit! Some three or four years ago, a well-known dealer came across a rather grubby envelope in 'a very ordinary scruffy lot which came into the shop' (to use his words). Knowing my

Fig 31 To demonstrate the use of slogans in meter franks Mr Kinnard drew this example alongside a hand-drawn town mark and printed frank



BRITISH STAMPS



Fig 32 First commercial use of a slogan in machine No 1, December 1922

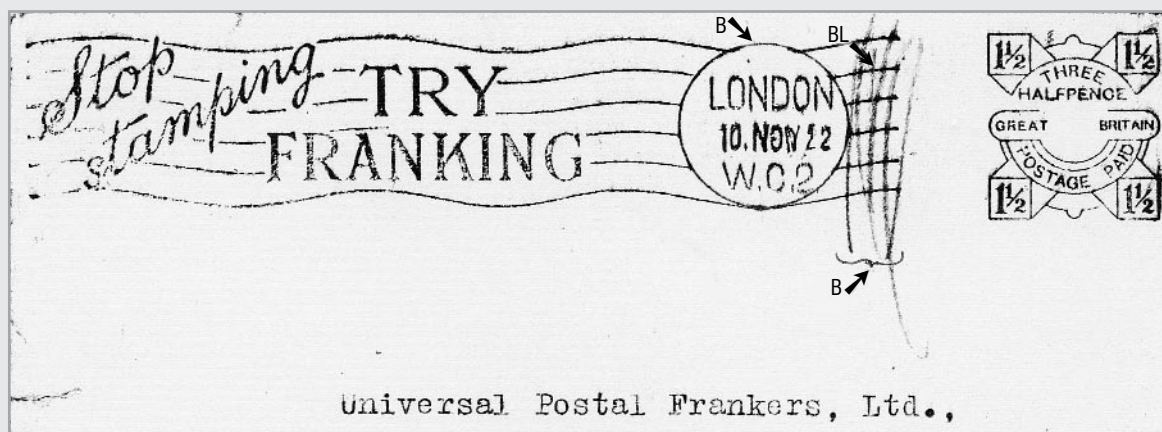


Fig 33 Specimen meter mark (no allocated number) showing pencil modifications (indicated by arrows)

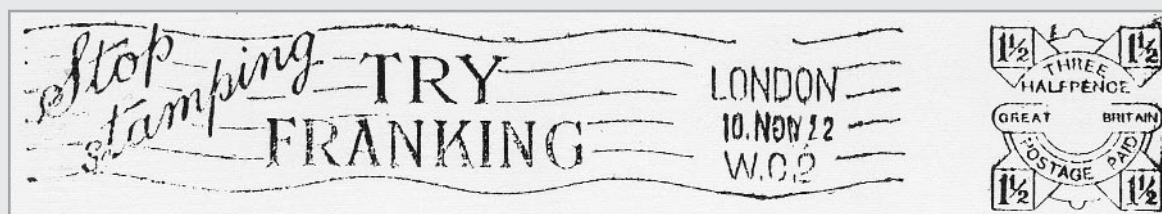


Fig 34 What the meter mark in Fig 33 looks like with the removal of the pencil modifications

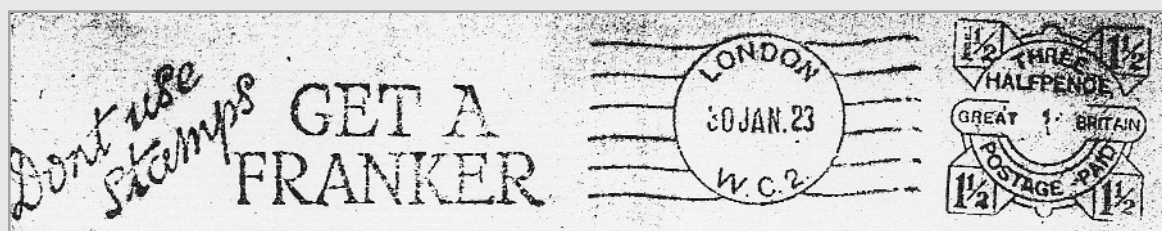


Fig 35 Slogan separated from the wavy lines

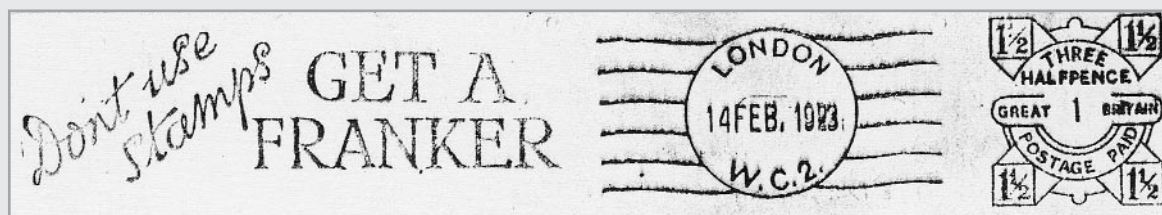


Fig 36 In February 1923 the frank size was reduced

Fig 37 Revised frank style of May 1923 showing the separately applied slogan impinging on the town mark

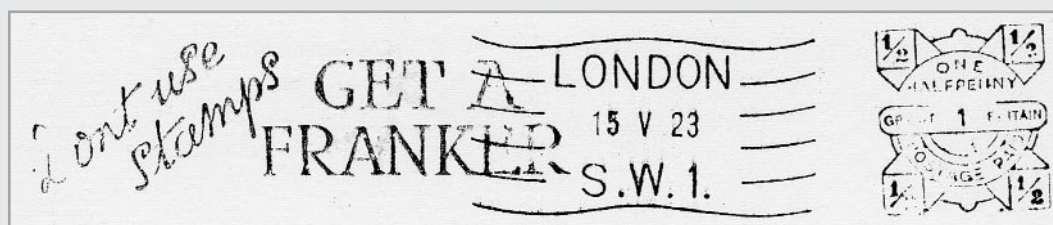
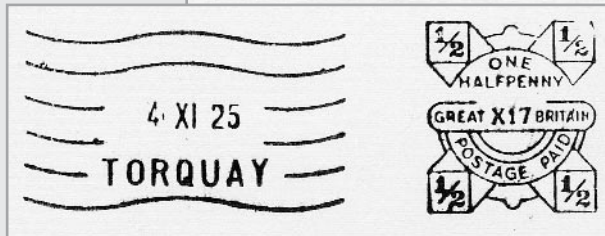


Fig 38 In August 1923 the letters of the place name were made smaller



If undelivered to be returned to:
STERLING TELEPHONE & ELECTRIC CO., LTD.
STERLING WORKS,
DAGENHAM, ESSEX.

ROMFORD
19 III 27
ESSEX



Fig 39 Sometimes the town mark included only two lines of type

interest, he showed it and later sold it to me. It is illustrated in *Fig 33*. The mark has three pencil modifications indicated by the arrows (B = Black and BL = Blue). The circle has been drawn with compasses and the wavy lines to the right scribbled over. Among the black scribble marks is one single vertical line in blue crayon. Could this indicate a suggested deletion and the other black pencil scribble be confirmatory initials? Mr Kinnard did have a flamboyant signature!

Removing the pencil marks, one is left with the printed mark (*Fig 34*). This is similar to *Fig 32* but dated some four weeks earlier. Furthermore, the frank has not been allocated a number and is smaller (23x25mm, instead of 25mm square). The mark is printed on a UPF envelope addressed to themselves. It is thus a specimen mark.

Assuming the date is correct (and there is no reason to doubt it any more than that on any of the other UPF specimens in 1922), then Mr Kinnard was again thinking well ahead, as we shall see.

The Post Office objected to the town mark being linked to the slogan by the wavy lines. The next style (*Fig 35*), dated 30 January 1923 (Courtesy Dr R McInroy) and used commercially, separated the three parts. The town mark was indeed a single circle as indicated by the earlier essay, but the frank size was still 25 mm square. The mark was printed in red.

In February 1923 the frank size was reduced to 23x25mm (again, as predicted by the 10 November essay) and UPF used this style for a short period in their machine No 1 (*Fig 36*).

By May 1923 the style of mark had evolved to that illustrated in *Fig 37*. The town mark was printed in black and the frank and slogan in red. The frank and town mark were applied by separate dies in a single 'operation', the envelope remaining in the same position, so keeping the spacing between them constant. The slogan was applied in a separate operation, the envelope being moved sideways under the slogan die. The spacing between slogan and town mark therefore varied. *Fig 37* shows the slogan impinging on the town mark.

In August 1923 the letters of the place name were made smaller, as illustrated in *Fig 38*, which is an example on an envelope from Sterling Telephone & Electric Co Ltd. Sometimes there were only two lines of type (*Fig 39*). The prefix 'X' to the machine number indicates a relief machine. The space available for the number in the frank was limited and numbers run from one up for each post town or London district appearing in the town mark. Pitney Bowes Model A machines, of which there were fewer, did not have this problem and the numbers run from one up country-wide.

Whereas the Pitney Bowes Model A was a fully developed machine from its first use in the UK, the UPF modified Moss machine could be said to have continued development until mid-1923. After this, although there were minor changes, they were largely cosmetic.

The UPF family

A UPF leaflet in the Post Office Heritage Collections, published at about this time, illustrates three machines heralded in Mr Kinnard's letter of 20 June 1922. The picture of the model NZ shows how the Moss machine had been 'cleaned up' in appearance (*Fig 40*). The Frank selection lever is at the top, allowing any one of six values to be printed (½d. to 1s.). The capacity is quoted as 1000 to 3000 envelopes per hour.

The Model ED.NZ is also shown—this was a model NZ mounted on a framework table, the handle being replaced by a pulley, belt-driven by an electric motor. A foot switch controlled the motor. The capacity listed is 2000 to 6000 envelopes per hour.

The third machine illustrated in the leaflet was Model HS, an International Postal Supply Company cancelling machine with an added detachable meter. This machine had an automatic feed device and could deal with between 5000 and 24,000 letters per hour.

The machines were hired out on the basis of three years decreasing rental payable in advance—60 Guineas for the Model NZ; 85 Guineas for the ED.NZ and 175 Guineas for

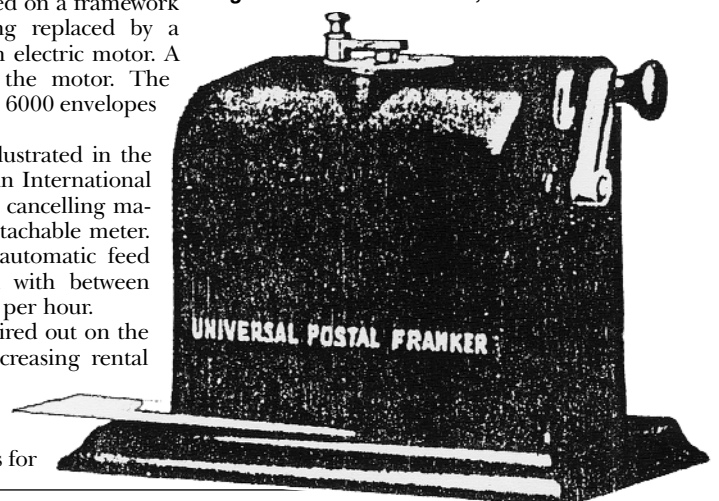
the Model HS. After the three years a nominal rental of about ⅓th of these amounts was charged to cover inspection and maintenance.

A letter from UPF to the Secretary of the Post Office dated 7 November 1923 begins 'We are now about ready to place in the hands of our customers the High Speed machine which your Engineering Department have inspected and been good enough to approve'. I mention this because Barfoot & Simon in their Catalogue give the introduction date as 14 February 1923, Mann in his Catalogue gives 1923 but Albert Harris in the first edition of his catalogue (1935) states 1924. It would be interesting to know of any mark which has been through the post and dated before 7 November 1923.

Eight of these machines were imported and were used with franks numbered 1, 2, 3, 3A, 4, 6, 8 and X1. The town mark was a single circle with seven wavy lines. The frank design was as for the UPF NZ machine. The marks were printed in red ink and the one illustrated in *Fig 41* was from the machine numbered 3A, used by J Henry Schröder & Co, the merchant bankers.

It must surely be more than a coincidence that the general appearance of the adopted meter marks bore a resemblance to the single impression stamp

Fig 40 UPF Moss machine, model NZ



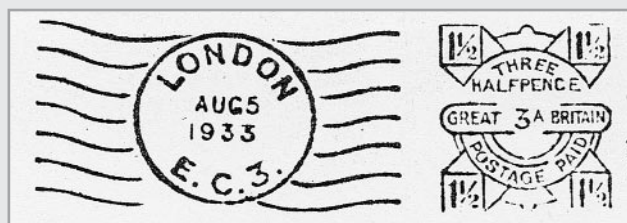


Fig 41 Frank and town die used in the Moss HS (high speed) machine of J Henry Schröder & Co

Fig 42 Single circle town mark



Fig 43 Double circle town mark



cancelling marks in use at that time. The frank being analogous to the postage stamp and the town mark, with wavy lines, to the cancellation. The Post Office was tending to standardise on single impression machines. Even the Norwegian makers (Krag) of the continuous impression machines were persuaded to produce a single impression machine. In these postmarks the place name was contained within a circular die. In the mid-1920s the official minds were not made up as to single or double circles! Kinnard was clearly aware of this and introduced a single circle town mark on one machine used by Samuel Farmer & Co Ltd of Leicester from January 1924. This is illustrated in Fig 42 and was printed in black ink. Later that year, double circle town marks appeared, either both circles being complete or in less common cases with the inner circle broken into arcs. Fig 43 shows an example of the latter. These marks are only known printed in red and without slogans.

Further progress

1924 and 1925 were noted for the Empire Exhibition at Wembley. An opportunity such as this could not be missed, certainly by Mr Kinnard and UPF. They had a stand in the New Zealand Pavilion. Two machines were demonstrated—Nos 1 and 2a. The town mark used a special design incorporating the Wembley Lion and was the first commemorative meter mark sanctioned for commercial use (Fig 44). These town marks can be found printed in either red or black—neither are common.

In April 1924 Postage Meters and Machines Company received from their American parents a new version of their machine. This Model B was said to be a desk-top machine but, as Fig 45 shows, it

needed a large desk and a sturdy one! The Model B used exactly the same meter as Model A and marks made cannot be distinguished. Because of the identical meters, the Post Office was able to arrange a speedy approval. The machine was examined on 29 April and approved on 6 May. Fig 45 shows (arrowed) the water container required for the envelope-sealing feature which was one of the selling points.

Also in 1924, Kinnard and UPF took out Patent 223974 (Provisional date, 2 April) for a machine which could print several frank values and record the total of money

expended. This has come to be termed a fixed value machine and the one shown in the patent and the first one made contained three frank dies. The die arrangement in the machine is sketched in Fig 46. The printing is by a rotating hub around which are spaced the town mark die and an optional slogan die, there is also a 'hole' through which a frank die protrudes when brought into position. The value counter is operated by a gear train, one part of which is selected and linked to the frank die which is in position. The machine was called the Universal TV machine, the letters 'TV'

Fig 45 The Model B machine

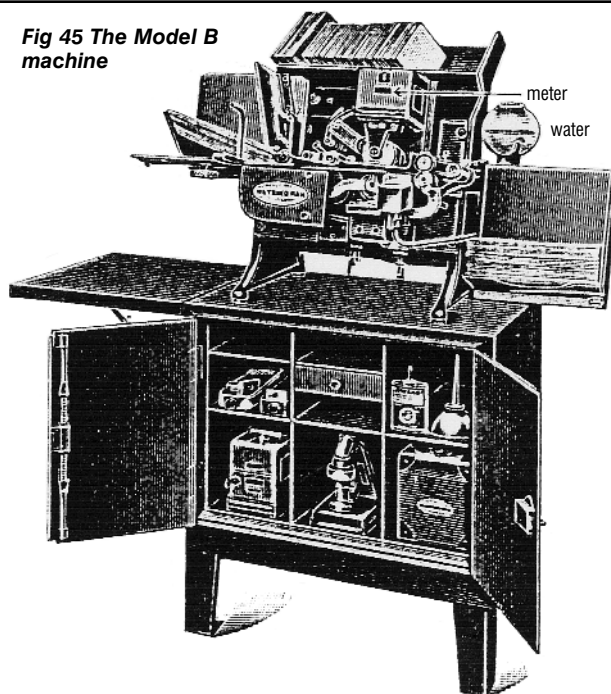
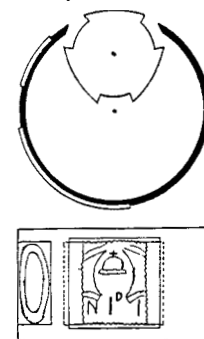


Fig 46 Sketch of the die arrangement used in the Universal TV (three value) machine



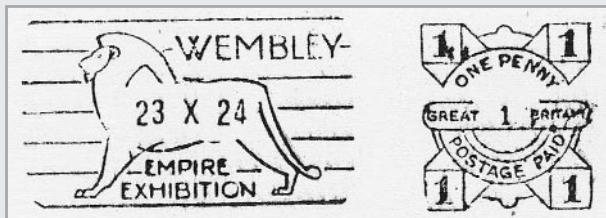


Fig 44 The first commemorative meter mark was used at the Empire Exhibition, Wembley

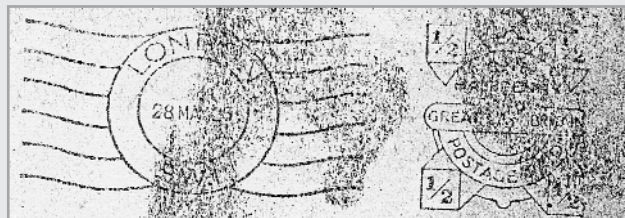
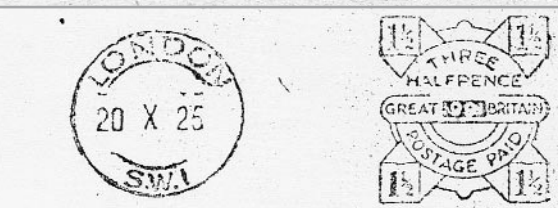
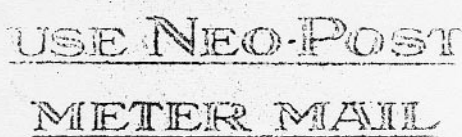


Fig 48 Frank from the Anglo-American Oil Co's Universal SM machine—complete with grease marks!

Fig 47
Specimen
frank from
the
Universal
SM (Special
Midget)
machine



Fig 50 Meter
mark from the
Neopost
machine



meaning 'Three Values'. This machine, after some further development, became the very popular Universal Midget. The prototype was also called the Universal SM or 'Special Midget'. Fig 47 shows a Specimen dated '7 Feb 24', perhaps optimistically numbered 15. One of the prototypes, numbered 5, was allocated to the Anglo-American Oil Co Ltd. This is illustrated in Fig 48—there are greasy marks on the envelope which I like to think were made by oil! It is dated '28 May 25'.

As business grew, Sterling Telephone & Electric Co found it difficult to cope—there were also some production problems with the NZ machines, castings and some other components had to be sub-contracted and delivery dates became difficult to forecast. Mr Kinnard became dissatisfied and money problems arose. In December 1924 he resigned as Director. He remained a shareholder but was replaced as Managing Director by George Vyvyan Wynne-Jones, a mining engineer, early in 1925.

Back at Pedersen's Gauges, Frank Langdon, the inventive tool maker, had, as early as 1922, had some ideas of his own and by

the end of 1924 had produced a prototype of a small rotary type of machine which worked very satisfactorily. It was patented in the joint names of Langdon and Pedersen's Gauges. The machine, illustrated in Fig 49, comprised a cast iron base into which single value die units could be placed. These were linked by appropriate gears to the counter.

Kinnard coined the name 'Neopost' for this machine and applied for Post Office approval. This was granted on 24 March 1925 for this one machine only, to be used at Kinnard's office in Victoria Street SW1. The approval specifically states a 1½d. frank and the letters were to be posted at the SW District Office.

The letter also mentions that 'The Postmaster General understands that the machine is already in use ...' The mark made is illustrated (Fig 50, by courtesy of Dr McNroy). The frank is of the style used by UPF and the number is 99 in white on a red background.

The story of Neopost will continue in the next article, telling of a new type of machine and a new style of frank.

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Newsletter of the Postal Mechanisation Study Circle. Published monthly and contains frequent reports on meter franking

Post Office Heritage Collections

Much historical correspondence between the Post Office and machine suppliers, together with many unique franking marks, are held in the Heritage Collections of the Post Office.

There is still great scope for research and interested readers who would like to view items should make an appointment by contacting: Curator, Philately, Heritage Services, Freeling House, Phoenix Place, London WC1X 0DL.

Fig 49 Frank Langdon's 'Neopost' machine

